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Survey: Teacher education in private sector

By Prof Nelofer Halai

The development of teacher education institutions in the private sector is a relatively recent development in Pakistan. This trend started with the encouragement of the private sector to invest in higher education in the 1980s when a number of private universities were chartered for the first time in Pakistan. The private sector tends to invest in professional education where the demand is high and the capital outlay is not large. That is one reason why business and computer studies and medical education have seen a relatively high investment by private entrepreneurs.

More recently, investment in teacher education institutions in the private sector has also increased as the demand for trained teachers has increased in both the public and private sectors. But there is very little knowledge about these institutions. This article hopes to shed some light on degree awarding institutions in the private sector based on a large inter-province study.

The teacher education institutions in the public sector are listed on the Government of Pakistan websites, however, such institutions in the private sector are very poorly documented. For this study from the more than 100 teacher education institutions identified in Karachi and Lahore in available directories a majority were in the public sector and offered Professional Teachers Course, Certificate of Teaching and short courses. Very few offered degree programmes in education. In the private sector, eight degree-awarding institutions in Karachi and Lahore out of a total of approximately 14 such institutions were identified and 65 teacher educators surveyed. The survey paints a complex multilayered picture of private institutions of teacher education and the teacher educators that teach in them.

There is the myth that teacher educators are not well-educated but the present study showed that this picture is in fact not correct. More than 78 per cent in Karachi and 96pc in Lahore possessed Master's, MPhil or PhD degrees at the time of their appointment. An interesting difference between teacher educators in Karachi and in Lahore is that in the former 71pc possess BEd and MEd degrees at the time of their appointment; whereas in Lahore only 26pc of teacher educators in the private sector had some professional qualification. For both the cities, the bulk of teacher educators had experience of teaching in schools ranging from primary to secondary and higher secondary and in a large majority of the cases this experience was for 10 years or more. Also teacher educators in both the cities are almost evenly divided among males and females.

However, the factor that greatly influences the practice of teacher education is their age. More than 34 per cent of teacher educators are above 50 years of age. This is most likely due to the fact that teacher educators come to institutions of teacher education after they have spent a substantial number of years teaching in schools.

Teacher education institutions in the private sector can be easily further sub-divided into non-profit institutions and those institutions that are market-driven or in other words for-profit. The non-profit institutions in the study were supported by philanthropic organisations and funds from donor agencies. They generally have a vision of teacher education and were committed to offering quality education. Their programmes were seen to generally admit a smaller number of students and charged fees which were not exorbitant but more than those charged by government institutions. Whereas the institutions that are called “market-driven” not only because they are for-profit institutions but because they are nimble and agile and respond to market demands much faster than the not-for-profit institutions are generally small, corporate-like businesses where the purpose is to enroll a large number of students at a reasonable cost. The students to a large extent are present in the class because they want a degree that provides them a license to practice their craft as a teacher and not necessarily to learn how to become better teachers.

These private schools are exploitative and commercial in their approach to education. At the same time they are almost postmodern in their business ethos and fill a very real need of a burgeoning middle class in the urban areas of Pakistan.

Some for-profit and not-for-profit institutions offer their coursework during the weekend to accommodate teachers who are already teaching in private schools. They start teaching on Friday afternoon, continue with classes on Saturday afternoon and the whole of Sunday is utilised to offer several courses. Hence, most of the teachers who cannot afford to take time off from their jobs for full-time study prefer to enroll in these institutions rather than government institutions which generally do not offer part-time study programmes.

It was observed that in for-profit institutions even if the programme was a full-time regular programme, attendance of student teachers was very poor during the weekdays. From the conversations and observations it was clear that despite requirements of full-time enrolment, teachers continued to work in schools and attended the institution only on weekends. When we started looking at the quality of instruction in these institutions based on generally used standards such as (a) qualification of faculty, (b) infrastructure for teaching learning such as library facilities, (c) computer laboratories, classroom facilities etc., (d) the building and (e) the environment, (f) the teacher student interaction in the class etc. — in every criteria except the first one that is qualification of teacher educators the market-driven institutions did very poorly. Yet the faculty had higher and better academic qualifications.

Private institutions for teacher education are greatly needed to fulfill the insatiable demand for professional development. It is also hoped that as these institutions become more established they might, like private schools at the K-12 level, start to plough some of their profits into better programmes and better facilities for their student teachers.

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